

Kadena hosts Okinawan Special Olympics 2001

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KADENA AIR BASE, Japan — More than 400 athletes took to sports fields and arenas here June 16 to compete in the Okinawa Special Olympics, which was hosted by the base for the second consecutive year.

The special athletes and their coaches came primarily from the three towns bordering the base, and about 25 U.S. athletes also took part. Competition included track events like the 200-meter and 400-meter running events, ground golf, soccer skills and basketball skills, as well as wheelchair races and events.

Highlighting this year's program were special guests Loretta Claiborne and Kayoko Hosokawa. Claiborne is a Special Olympics athlete and member of that organization's board of directors. Hosokawa is president of Special Olympics Nippon.

Other guests included Okinawa Prefecture Governor Keiichi Inamine, who was part of the original Special Olympics hosted by Kadena, as well as Okinawa Minister of Foreign Affairs Hiroshi Hashimoto.

The event also featured an art show by local artists with special needs in the O'Connor Gym.

Although the program is young, it has grown fast, according to Col. J.C. Cantrell, 18th Support Group deputy commander and Kadena's chairman of the Okinawa Special Olympics this year.

"This year, Special Olympics grew in the commitment of the community to support the event as a year-round activity, and in the vision of working toward full certification with Special Olympics International," said Cantrell. "Team Kadena has pledged to host a major Special Olympics event annually.

"One of the ways we are growing the program is by working closely with Special Olympics Japan as they establish a formal office in Okinawa," he added.

Cantrell emphasized that the success of the program is dependent upon the more than 1,500 volunteers from every service on Okinawa who came out to support the athletes June 16, and who also worked behind the scenes many weeks prior to the event.



Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Vincent Parker

Okinawan Special Olympian Miyazata Takashi gives a thumbs up after his victory in the 30-meter sprint during this year's Okinawa Special Olympics held June 16 at Kadena Air Base, Japan. Walking with him is volunteer Airman 1st Class Shannon Hickman, 18th Aerospace Medicine Squadron. Hickman joined more than 2,000 military members and civilians from Okinawa who volunteered during the event. This year marked the second consecutive year Kadena has hosted the games.

"From the planning committee that works year-round to those who arrive on the last day and ask 'is there something I can do to help?' it is the volunteers who provide the infrastructure that leads to the athletes' triumphs," said Cantrell. "From the U.S. marine Corps Battalion that brings 500 Marine volunteers, to the single airman who says 'I can help cook hot dogs or man a water station,' it is the volunteers who bring the Special Olympics to the entire community."

One volunteer, Sean Walko, said he wanted to participate because some of his family members also have special needs, and he has worked with people with special needs. The 18th Communications Squadron telephone repairman spent the day encouraging athletes to throw softballs as hard and as far as they could.

"It's great for the kids, no matter what disease or handicap they have, to come out here and do this and have fun," said the senior airman. "It really warms your heart."

One person who benefited from the spirit of the games was Olympian Tamatatsu Matsuda of Chatan Town. The event June 16 was the first time he'd ever participated in the Special Olympics, and was also the first time he'd ever been on a U.S. military installation.

Although he "enjoyed playing ground golf," he said this year's Special Olympics would probably be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for him, because his health isn't very good. Nonetheless, he said he had a great day at Kadena.

Making the day special for people like Matsuda is why volunteers like Walko say they feel it's important to continue supporting the Special Olympics.

"For a day, they are the ones on the podium," he said. "They are the ones on top of the world."

The Special Olympics is an international year-round program of sports training and competition for individuals with special needs. More than 1 million athletes train and compete in 26 Olympic-type summer and winter sports.

Kunsan softball schedule American League

Monday
8 p.m.
AMMO vs. COMM (A)
9 p.m.
TRANS (A) vs. 80th FS

Wednesday
No games scheduled
HOLIDAY

Friday
6 p.m.
National League games
7 p.m.
National League games
8 p.m.
CPTF vs. 80th FS
9 p.m.
MSS vs. 80th FS

National League

Tuesday
No games scheduled

Thursday
6 p.m.
AGE vs. QA
7 p.m.
SVS vs. QA
8 p.m.
CES (B) vs. MXS (D)
9 p.m.
F-ARMY vs. MXS (D)

Softball Standings

Current as of June 28

American League

AMMO	7-1
TRANS (A)	5-1
CES (A)	6-2
SFS	6-2
80th FS	5-3
COMM (A)	3-5
SUPS (A)	4-5
35th FS	1-5
MSS	1-6
CPTF	0-9

National League

CES (B)	7-1
MXS (D)	6-2
AGE	6-2
F-ARMY	6-2
QA	5-3
MDG	3-4
OSS	4-4
SFS (K-9)	4-4
SVS	2-5
TRANS (B)	2-5
Comm (B)	1-7
SUPS (B)	0-8

Golf course tee time policy

Courtesy of the Westwinds Golf Course

Summertime is here and the Kunsan golf course is getting crowded. There are many tee times available, but everyone must follow the tee time policy.

–Weekday play does not require tee time. It is on a first come, first serve basis. However, U.S. active-duty military members have priority on the first tee.

–On weekends, U.S. holidays and 8th Fighter Wing down days, play requires advanced reservations.

–U.S. active-duty military members, Department of Defense civilians, Republic of Korea officers and civilian employees assigned to Kunsan may reserve tee times starting at 7 a.m. the preceding Sunday.

–Korean American Friendship Council and Korean American Golf Association members may reserve tee times starting at 9 a.m. the preceding Friday.

–Tee times are reserved for 18 holes of golf only.
–Players must check in at least 10 minutes prior to

tee time or reservations will be cancelled.

–Tee times will not be given to groups of less than three players or more than four.

–Four starter times are given out on a first come, first served basis to players not having a tee time.

Golfers who arrive at the course without a tee time can check with the clerk or starter, who will try to work individuals in with another group or arrange them to get their group on the course.

For more information about upcoming tournaments, tee times or golf course rules, call the Westwinds Golf Course at 782-5435.